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Review by *Hoboes: Bindlestiffs, Fruit Tramps, and the Harvesting of the West* by Mark Wyman

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Hoboes: Bindlestiffs, Fruit Tramps, and the Harvesting of the West. By Mark Wyman. New York: Hiller and Wang, 2010. 336 pp. Maps, photographs, notes, index. $28.00 cloth, $16.00 paper.

Mark Wyman presents the conflicting and often contradictory ways our government has dealt with immigration to satisfy the demands of western growers who have claimed since the late 1880s that there was a shortage of available labor to harvest crops. In the process of meeting the challenge of ripe crops going to waste, local entities used children from reform schools and Native Americans from boarding schools to perform agricultural labor cheaply. Congress, in banning Chinese immigration under the Exclusion Act of 1882, kept the door cracked open to admit Japanese and Hindu workers to do some of the more advanced tasks in viniculture such as pruning and carefully picking delicate fruit without bruising the skin.

From the opening up of the Great Plains with bonanza wheat farms in the Dakotas to the industrialization of sugar beet growing in the valleys of Nebraska and Colorado, Wyman invites readers to accompany him on the railroads. First riding with the single male hoboes and bindlestiffs who harvested wheat, we travel later in the 1890s with the Russian-German families who cultivated sugar beets and eventually owned a share in the lands of western Nebraska and northern Colorado. In addition to presenting colorful and detailed narratives that give some dimension to the thousands of nameless workers, the book reflects the currents of rail transportation in the late 1800s in settling the frontier West and follows this through the 1920s when automobiles began to be the main form of transportation for transients and migrant workers.

The conflicting attitudes Americans held toward hoboes were not limited to immigrant migratory workers. Wyman shows how people in Spokane, Washington, felt about hoboes who had helped them battle forest fires in the early 1900s but were then shuffled out of town when there were not enough logging jobs to go around for residents and migrants alike. But some of the most interesting drama unfolds in the chapters focused on attempts by the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) to unionize bindlestiffs and other "working stiffs" in the West. The scene of families struggling in 100+ temperatures in Wheatland, California, in the days leading up to the strike and subsequent riot on the Durst hops ranch where many children worked is sad and shocking, both for what happened and for what failed to be remedied after the riot, in spite of an investigation by the federal Industrial Relations Commission.

This book offers readers insight into how the U.S. has met its agricultural labor needs and how migratory workers have been unheralded in producing such bounty for our country at often great costs to themselves.

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